

THE MADNESS OF CHARTRULEAN  
A Gardeka Story

S1:E02  
"THE RITES OF JHARDOESTRA"

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## TMOC EPISODE 2: THE RITES OF JHARDOESTRA

SIMITU CAPITAL BUILDING MAIN HALL - CHARTRULEAN ARRIVES

[Muffled sounds of music and laughter from party-goers.  
Sounds of opening doors]

NARRATOR

Chartrulean climbed the steps to the capitol and entered the grand foyer. He was engulfed by a cloud of scented vapor. As the vapor thinned and the room opened up, he found himself part of a moving collage of strange geometry and discordant color, with the occasional protrusion of a human arm or leg. It all blurred together, one monstrous abstraction, a miasma of manufactured euphoria to entertain the witless masses.

CHARTRULEAN  
(thinking)  
*How...annoying.*

NARRATOR

Hundreds of penetrating eyes only added to the nightmarish experience of it. Whispers of his name rolled off of cautious tongues. But as Chartrulean pushed further into the room, the crowd broke around him like water around a stone .

[Footsteps. Conversations dying down, whispers]

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)  
(thinking)  
*Just like I feared, all eyes are on the abomination! But no one is throwing stones, though.*

NARRATOR

As his senses returned, the shapes of people began to emerge from the miasma. Chartrulean was the only person in the room wearing black.

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)  
(thinking)  
*These people are not like the mob from memory. These expressions are devoid of conviction. Or anything, for that matter.*

## YOBA INTERCEPTS CHARTRULEAN

YOBA  
 (distant)  
 Uh oh, uh oh, excuse me.

[Woman yelping]

YOBA (CONT'D)  
 (distant)  
 Sorry dear, crisis aversion coming  
 through.

[Sounds of murmuring voices. Then sound of Yoba's footsteps  
 quickly approaching]

YOBA (CONT'D)  
 Chartrulean!  
 (whispering)  
 What were you thinking? If you were  
 actually worried about making a  
 scene, you'd have just worn what I  
 sent.

CHARTRULEAN  
 Thank you, but I couldn't do it.  
 (beat)  
 I see that's not the case for you.

YOBA  
 Don't make fun. This hat was  
 expensive.

CHARTRULEAN  
 This was a mistake.

YOBA  
 It's fine, I'll make up some kind  
 of excuse.

CHARTRULEAN  
 Do I need an excuse?

YOBA  
 It's the socially responsible thing  
 to do when you reject a gift. Now  
 come with me, there are lots of  
 people asking for an introduction.  
 (lowering voice)  
 I apologize in advance for some of  
 them.

CHARTRULEAN

(panicked)

I don't think I can talk to these people. Not if I have to take any of them seriously.

YOBA

Don't you want to find out who gave you that brooch? At least you wore that, I see...

CHARTRULEAN

Can we get it out of the way?

YOBA

No. She's...well, you'll see.

CHARTRULEAN

What about King Starbringer? C

YOBA

(getting frustrated)

Will you stop? He doesn't just stand around shaking peoples' hands at random, he meets them on his terms. Now come with me. I'll do all the talking if I have to. And try not to look so damn severe, you're scaring people. Speaking of which...

NARRATOR

Yoba pointed across the foyer to a gold winged hat, spangled capelet, and epaulets to match. Despite the flamboyant attire, the long face the hat sat upon was twisted into a perpetual sigh. Apparently even the wealthiest circles had their outcasts.

An out-of-place shock of inked flesh grabbed Chartrulean's attention. A bear of a man with a shining bald head, crossed arms making him appear even more domineering. His eyes scanned the room, eventually landing on Chartrulean.

YOBA (CONT'D)

That's Prince Imsep Starbringer, and his guardian, Loam.

CHARTRULEAN

That's the *prince*?

YOBA

Eh, the prince, you should know, is openly called "the broken prince".

(MORE)

YOBA (CONT'D)  
I'd feel sorry for him if it  
weren't for his rotten attitude.

CHARTRULEAN  
How is he broken?

YOBA  
Weak genes. Unfit to continue the  
bloodline. You know what, I think  
actually we'll skip that  
introduction for now. I'm getting  
depressed just looking at him.

CHARTRULEAN  
Fine by me.

YOBA  
Ah! Follow me.

CONVERSATION #1 - BIGOTED WOMAN

BIGOTED WOMAN  
(distant)  
Chamberlain, *there* you are.

YOBA  
(whispering)  
Oh no. Walk faster.

CHARTRULEAN  
(hissing)  
What?!

YOBA  
(whispering)  
Don't. Say. Anything.

BIGOTED WOMAN  
Is that *him*?

YOBA  
(clearing throat)  
No, no. I was just removing this  
man for a dress code violation.

BIGOTED WOMAN  
You think you're being funny, but  
I'm not so easy to fool.

YOBA  
Then there's no need for an  
introduction. We carry on.

BIGOTED WOMAN

Not so fast.

YOBA

(sighing)

How can we help you, Ma'am?

BIGOTED WOMAN

My husband is on King Starbringer's council, don't you know?

YOBA

Yes, where is that husband of yours? Eh--

BIGOTED WOMAN

He tells me that the king plans to end his support for Boethema Labs. Is this true?

YOBA

This isn't the place for that conversation, Ma'am.

BIGOTED WOMAN

Boethema is *critical* to the future of our people. Without it, there are *no desirables*. Think of *the children*.

YOBA

We are thinking of the children. All of them.

BIGOTED WOMAN

Well, in my opinion, those laws are in place for good reason. We must keep out all the bad eggs, pardon the pun.

CHARTRULEAN

(angry clearing throat)

Mmmmmhmmmmhmmhm.....

BIGOTED WOMAN

What? Can't he speak?

YOBA

Actually we were just looking for something to drink, he ate something particularly salty. Didn't you?

[Sound of hard patting, Chartrulean coughing]

BIGOTED WOMAN

I'm sorry you have to hear me go on like this, but I just don't see how you can just pull the plug after all the good Boethema has done for Arcas.

YOBA

Plenty of good, yes. So long as you're not Jhardekai.

BIGOTED WOMAN

The Jhardekai are too dangerous to be allowed to run around unchecked. All their little...peculiarities.

CHARTRULEAN

Eh--

YOBA

(interrupting)

I think he's saved the children plenty. Come on.

BIGOTED WOMAN

What happens when people are allowed to reproduce freely without going through the proper channels, *especially* the pariah? Not to mention, there are already too many mouths to feed, and hardly enough resources to go around.

[conversation fades out]

CHARTRULEAN IGNORES THE BIGOTED WOMAN

NARRATOR

Chartrulean was no longer listening. He was remembering a night long ago when he came upon a woman with a fractured skull, cradling an infant. The woman died right there at his feet, begging him to save the boy from those who hunted them. Chartrulean had the boy taken in secret to Idrica, where he was raised in the seminary. In Simitu, the boy would have been labeled a fugitive. His only crime was being born Jhardekai.

CHARTRULEAN

(thinking)

*All the paladins.*

(MORE)

## CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)

*From watching their families being torn apart, to having been handed out of Boethema's back door, their pasts are tragic. This woman sees them as dangerous, while it's bigotry like hers that presents the real danger.*

[Sounds snap back to present]

## THE BIGOTED WOMAN B

## BIGOTED WOMAN

As I was saying--

## YOBA

Ah, Pytra! Please excuse us Ma'am, we do need to go say hello to these lovely ladies.

[Beat]

## CHARTRULEAN

(whispering)

I am leaving.

## YOBA

(whispering)

No you're not.

## CONVERSATION #2 - PYTRA AND VETRA

## PYTRA

Chamberlain!

## YOBA

This is Pytra and Vetra. They operate a hydroponics farm on one of the elevators nearest Astreus. They wanted to meet their neighbor. Well....relatively speaking.

## VETRA

This must be Chartrulean!

## PYTRA

A man of fashion. What a bold statement with the black.

## VETRA

Why didn't you warn us he's so roguishly handsome?

YOBA  
 (winking)  
 And a bachelor.

CHARTRULEAN  
 Ehh--

VETRA  
 Our facilities may be separated by miles on the ground, but we feel so close to you up in the sky.

PYTRA  
 We've enjoyed watching your work from afar. The Nine are stunning.

[Yoba clears throat]

CHARTRULEAN  
 Appreciated.

VETRA  
 I've heard from insiders that Astreus is doing some very interesting things with plants.

CHARTRULEAN  
 (awkward)  
 Our experiments have produced some phenomena in the gardens.

PYTRA  
 Anything that can help with the food shortages?

CHARTRULEAN  
 Not conclusively, but very promising.

VETRA  
 Maybe we can get a little tour one of these days?

CHARTRULEAN  
 We're a closed facility.

YOBA  
 But we'll be in touch if anything changes. Won't we?

CHARTRULEAN  
 (clears throat)  
 I will give it some thought.

PYTRA

I hope you do.

YOBA

Thank you ladies, please excuse us.  
I do need to catch this man over  
here.

VETRA

Circle back around if you can!

### CONVERSATION #3 - THE MEDIA MAN

YOBA

Chartrulean, let me introduce you  
to Lybender. He's in charge of all  
our state media. I work with him  
very closely.

LYBENDER

Very closely indeed! It's an honor  
to finally meet the Etruvian  
Superman in person. I've chronicled  
so much of your life it feels like  
I already know you. Maybe you've  
seen some of my agency's work?

CHARTRULEAN

No. I stay disconnected.

YOBA

I don't think you even have a  
custodian, do you?

CHARTRULEAN

I hate those devices.

LYBENDER

Then how do you get the news? All  
the latest events?

CHARTRULEAN

I don't.

YOBA

I guess when you are the news,  
there's no need. Am I right?

CHARTRULEAN

That's not the case at all. I  
believe some innovation actually  
hinders progress.

LYBENDER

(incredulous)

Does having the ability to communicate with loved ones hinder us?

CHARTRULEAN

When the message becomes mixed with soulless garbage, yes.

LYBENDER

(awkward laugh)

So, the real topic of the evening is whether you-know-who will show up tonight?

YOBA

Are you trying to give me a heart attack?

CHARTRULEAN

Who do you mean?

YOBA

Josquin. He's a freshman alderman from Cailou, and a bit of a troublemaker.

LYBENDER

The New Regime is really ramping up propaganda for their little underground movement. We're actually having a hard time controlling it.

YOBA

We're trying to catch the little terrorists as we can, but they seem to be growing in numbers. King Starbringer will downplay it if you ask him, but it is concerning.

[Chartrulean clears throat]

LYBENDER

But I'm more interested in how life outside of The Order is treating you, Chartrulean?

CHARTRULEAN

Fair enough.

YOBA

He's being modest.

LYBENDER

How does it feel to have played such an important part in ending the war?

CHARTRULEAN

Terrible.

LYBENDER

How about your little Jhardekai knights? How are they feeling about everything?

CHARTRULEAN

Mutual.

LYBENDER

And are you concerned about any backlash from The Order?

CHARTRULEAN

I don't have the energy to waste on speculation.

YOBA

Alright, alright, I think you get the point. The man's a poor interview.

[Awkward laughter]

YOBA (CONT'D)

Excuse us, we do need to go say hello to these gentlemen over here.

LYBENDER

The War Hawks? Ooof, good luck with that...

YOBA

We'll need it.

#### CONVERSATION #4 - THE WAR HAWKS

WAR HAWK 1

(far away)

But now that the war is ending, certain sectors will suffer. Mark my words. Unless we can negotiate trade with the Rau, which seems *preposterous*, the growth we've seen this past century just isn't going to be sustainable.

YOBA

(whispering)

Now, these men are major stakeholders in Simitu's defense sector.

(aside)

They're worried you're going to put everyone else out of business.

CHARTRULEAN

I am very aware.

YOBA

Just try to tone down the cynicism. They're very...well, you'll see.

[Conversation fades in]

WAR HAWK 2

If I had it my way, we would have *escalated* instead. Too many industries have benefitted.

YOBA

Gentlemen! I wanted to introduce you to--

WAR HAWK 1

Ah! Chartrulean! The man who never returns our calls.

WAR HAWK 2

Ironic, seeing how I hear Astreus is out of money.

YOBA

Isn't that usually the time people pretend to be friendly with one another?

WAR HAWK 1

Just goes to show you can win a war and still lose at the long game.

CHARTRULEAN

We haven't lost. We're just starting.

WAR HAWK 2

We're curious to hear more about what you've been up to over there. Too many secrets if you ask me.

YOBA

I glean that you've been invited to Lapadine's summit?

WAR HAWK 1

(ignoring)

So Chartrulean! How do you think these negotiations will affect the market?

CHARTRULEAN

I make war ships, not markets.

[Awkward silence]

WAR HAWK 1

We are the market!

[Footsteps approaching]

LAPADINE BAILS CHARTRULEAN OUT

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

(clears throat)

On the contrary. Chartrulean and I have been very hard at work.

WAR HAWK 1

Ah! Lapadine!

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

We've expanded our focus, which we'll gladly tell you all about tomorrow.

WAR HAWK 1

Focus on what?

WAR HAWK 2

Don't keep us in suspense! How about an anecdote, at least?

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

(whispering)

I'm glad to see I'm not the only man here in uniform. Now run while you can, I'll handle the war hawks.

CHARTRULEAN

Thank you.

WAR HAWK 1

Mark my words. Unless we can negotiate trade, which seems preposterous...

[Conversation fades away]

YOBA AND CHARTRULEAN RUN FROM THE WAR HAWKS

YOBA

Remind me to thank the Admiral later. I usually find your blunt idealism highly entertaining, but that...

CHARTRULEAN

...was exactly the kind of scenario I was hoping to avoid.

(embarrassed)

I don't understand the business, just the technology.

YOBA

But you are a fast learner...

CHARTRULEAN

The intricacies of human behavior still evade me.

YOBA

It's a skill you can learn like anything else. Much like dancing.

[Beat]

CHARTRULEAN

This is maddening.

YOBA

Tell me about it.

CHARTRULEAN

I don't understand how you tolerate all this. You're not an idiot.

YOBA

It's called patience. Something you clearly lack.

CHARTRULEAN

Patience can be confused with complacency.

YOBA  
Not in my case.

[Tinkering of wine glasses on tray]

WAITRESS  
Berry bubbly?

YOBA  
Ah! Perfect! Here.

CHARTRULEAN  
Oh no. I don't--

YOBA  
Shut up and drink. Cheers. To old friends.

[Clinking of glasses, drinking, Chartrulean wincing]

YOBA (CONT'D)  
Let's face it. We never really were the best of friends.

CHARTRULEAN  
You're as strange to me as that thing on your head.

YOBA  
Well, your jokes are improving.

[Sounds of crowd gasping. Music crescendoes and stops. Sounds of someone coughing far away]

CHARTRULEAN  
What's wrong?

YOBA  
The Rau ambassadors are here with their escort. Excuse me.

CHARTRULEAN  
You're leaving me by myself?

YOBA  
I can't be your chaperone, I have work to do. *Don't. Leave.* If I catch you being too much of a wallflower, I'll send in reinforcements. I have many spies.

## CHARTRULEAN MEETS THE RAU

NARRATOR

A break in the crowd gave Chartrulean a clear view of the three Rau ambassadors. They were unmistakable. Not because they were encircled by Arcasian guards, but because two of them towered over everyone by at least a full head's height. Brightly-colored hair was styled using some kind of heavy grease, making it appear helmet-like. Their faces were human, but were long and sallow with small, jagged features. Their thin bodies were draped in tapestry-like robes and long feathered capes in hues of dark translucent blues and greens, and they stood hunched over with the mannerisms of old men of poor health.

The third ambassador was a withered version of the others, but with the same sharp features. He leaned on a cane and coughed into a velvet kerchief.

Aside from the obvious, something was strange about them that couldn't be placed from a distance.

Then Chartrulean's stomach turned as the green-haired ambassador's eyes met his. They sparkled from across the room, like the last thing the prey of a raptor might see before being carried off into the night.

Without breaking eye contact, the Rau leaned into Yoba. Yoba followed the long pointed finger that was aimed in Chartrulean's direction, then his face suddenly drained of all color.

## CHARTRULEAN MEETS THE RAU B

DRECHEN

(distant)

Out of my way!

[Cacophony of footsteps, confused crowd]

DRECHEN (CONT'D)

(sudden, booming)

Let me through! One side! I must speak with him.

CHARTRULEAN

*(thinking)**Why is one of them coming this way?  
Yoba, why aren't you stopping this?*

[Sounds of more guards approaching]

YOBA  
 (out of breath)  
 Guards, it's all right.

DRECHEN  
 I only wanted to shake the hand of  
 the man who with a mere nine ships  
 displayed more destructive power  
 than a third of our armada.  
 Chartrulean, the shipbuilder. I  
 only have respect.

CHARTRULEAN  
 Respect?

YOBA  
 (out of breath)  
 Guards, it's all right. Ambassadors  
 Drechen, Cydar, and Grobien, let me  
 introduce you to Chartrulean.

CHARTRULEAN  
 I...lement...the loss of life my  
 work has brought upon you and your  
 people.

GROBIEN  
 (interrupting)  
 No need for all that. We have  
 resolved that with great loss comes  
 great opportunity.

DRECHEN  
 We look forward to mutually-  
 beneficial interplanetary  
 cooperation. There is...much...we  
 can learn from one another.

[Some awkward scattered applause from bystanders]

YOBA  
 The banquet is about to start. Take  
 the ambassadors to their seats when  
 it's time. I have to go check on  
 something.

YOBA'S ASSISTANT  
 Yes, Chamberlain.

CHARTRULEAN  
 (hissing)  
 Must you really?

YOBA  
 (whispering)  
 I'm sorry.

[Footsteps receding]

GROBIEN  
 We were so sad to learn that a tour  
 of Astreus was not on the agenda.

DRECHEN  
 You owe us at least that much. Or  
 are Rau lives not price enough to  
 pay? Seeing that you care so much.

CHARTRULEAN  
 I will look into it.

GROBIEN  
 You could come work for *us*.  
 Obviously you aren't being well  
 rewarded, judging from your plain  
 clothes.

CHARTRULEAN  
 I assure you that I am living below  
 my means. But I appreciate the  
 offer.

GROBIEN  
 Oh that's right....they say that  
 you are a *religious* man. Is that  
 why you look so sullen?

CHARTRULEAN  
 Even if that were the case, there'd  
 be no reason to look sullen about  
 it. It was Jhardeho itself that  
 defeated you.

[A beat, then the ambassadors break out into cackling  
 laughter. Coughing from Cydar]

DRECHEN  
 Cydar does not like the dryness of  
 your planet. The harshness without  
 the moisture in the air is most  
 unkind to his lungs. It's--

[Banquet music. Cheers from crowd]

RANDOM VOICE 1  
 It's starting!

RANDOM VOICE 2  
Finally, I'm starved.

YOBA'S ASSISTANT  
Ambassadors, right this way please.

DRECHEN  
I'd like to continue this  
conversation later. Until then,  
shipbuilder....

[Footsteps recede. Chartrulean breathing heavily]

LAPADINE CHARTRULEAN DOWN AFTER THE RAU

ADMIRAL LAPADINE  
It didn't take them very long to  
find you.

CHARTRULEAN  
Should I be worried?

ADMIRAL LAPADINE  
Your work is probably of utmost  
importance to them, seeing that  
it's the only thing keeping them in  
check.

CHARTRULEAN  
Well, I think I've had enough  
diplomacy for one evening. Please  
give Yoba my thanks.

ADMIRAL LAPADINE  
Ah-ah-ah, not so fast. I've been  
told not to let you leave.

CHARTRULEAN  
Traitor.

[The Admiral laughs]

YOBA  
(far away)  
Chartrulean! Over here!

[Transitional music cue]

CHARTRULEAN TAKES HIS SEAT

NARRATOR

Yoba waved Chartrulean over to a large semi-circular table. A long narrow platform cut the room in half, and ended near its center. Three empty seats waited there, presumably for the Starbringer family.

His seat was a little more than halfway up one side of the arc. The seat to his right was still empty, and the man occupying the space to his left was making a concentrated effort not to acknowledge him, which Chartrulean had no problem with.

The Rau ambassadors were seated almost directly across the room. Drechen was still glaring obsessively.

ANNOUNCER

Lords and ladies, his royal majesty  
King Starbringer and Prince Imsep.

[Applause]

NARRATOR

Starting at the end of the table, a murmur of excitement crescendoed into a wave of roaring applause. King Starbringer had materialized and was making his way around the table, shaking hands and saying a few brief words to some of the guests.

The King's charisma was a force. Chartrulean noted that when he shook the peoples' hands, he planted his other hand firmly on their shoulder. His silver mustache curled up at the corners when he smiled, and steely blue eyes radiated with good humor.

CYTHAELIA ARRIVES - CHARTRULEAN MEETS KSB

CYTHAELIA

Sorry I'm late. I'm Cythaelia.

CHARTRULEAN

Chartrulean.

CYTHAELIA

(giggling)

I know.

CHARTRULEAN

This is an embarrassing question...  
but...what exactly am I supposed to  
do when I meet the king?

CYTHAELIA

Uhm--

KING STARBRINGER  
Ahhh! Chartrulean the shipbuilder.  
Finally we meet in person!

CHARTRULEAN  
I'm sorry, I --

KING STARBRINGER  
Just shake my hand. And don't  
worry, I'm very hard to disappoint.  
Speaking of which, Yoba told me  
that the suit we picked out for you  
was a bad fit.

CHARTRULEAN  
Ahh, yes, about that...

KING STARBRINGER  
You are taller than I expected. But  
Yoba, you disappoint me.  
(laughing heartily)  
You're usually good at sizing  
people up!

YOBA  
(through teeth)  
I'm only disappointed there wasn't  
enough time to have it altered.  
Isn't that right?

CHARTRULEAN  
Eh--

KING STARBRINGER  
No need to dwell on it. I'm happy  
enough that you came. We're looking  
forward to finally seeing Astreus.

CHARTRULEAN  
Yes. We're all very excited for  
tomorrow.

KING STARBRINGER  
(confused)  
What? Tomorrow, already?

YOBA  
Yes, tomorrow! Do we need to go  
over your itinerary again *right*  
*now*?

KING STARBRINGER  
Right! Tomorrow it is then.  
(whispering)  
(MORE)

KING STARBRINGER (CONT'D)

I was hoping to mention you in my speech. I hope you don't mind?

CHARTRULEAN

I don't...

KING STARBRINGER

Good! We'll talk more later.

(leans in)

And you can explain to me where you got that brooch.

CHARTRULEAN

I-

KING STARBRINGER

Ah, Cythaelia!

CYTHAELIA

Your Majesty.

KING STARBRINGER

Is my daughter about ready?

CYTHAELIA

She is, sir. She looks like a goddess herself.

[Yoba and King Starbringer sounding more distant]

KING STARBRINGER

Good to hear.

YOBA

Make sure our star shipbuilder is comfortable, Cythaelia.

CYTHAELIA

Oh, I will.

[Beat]

CYTHAELIA IS A SPY

CHARTRULEAN

I take it you're one of Yoba's spies.

CYTHAELIA

A spy. But not Yoba's.

CHARTRULEAN  
 (through teeth)  
 Fantastic.

[Cydar coughing loudly]

CYTHAELIA  
 Is he all right?

CHARTRULEAN  
 Do we *have* to talk?

CYTHAELIA  
 Are you always rude?

CHARTRULEAN  
 I don't do idle chatter.

[Beat]

CYTHAELIA  
 Anyways, I think they're unnerving.

CHARTRULEAN  
 If I agree with you, can we then  
 stand here in silence?

[Blaring music cue, applause]

CYTHAELIA  
 Thank goodness. Things were about  
 to get uncomfortable, weren't they?

THE BANQUET STARTS

NARRATOR

Performers spilled onto the stage in costumes draped in shimmering silver, dancing and tumbling in a brilliant display of agility. Others carried larger-than-life effigies of Mystic Saints on long poles.

It took a moment before Chartrulean realized what he was seeing. It was a condensed story of Arcas. The first men, the Mystics, the fertile era full of grazing beasts, the blight, the war, and a journey to the stars.

ANNOUNCER  
 Lords and Ladies, her royal  
 highness, Princess Sophrosyne  
 Starbringer!

[Transitional music cue]

NARRATOR

A small figure stepped out onto the stage wearing a gown that shimmered so intensely in the spotlight that it was almost blinding. Suspended above her head was the unmoving face of the goddess Jhardoestra, her face twisted and frozen in eternal anguish. The princess was hidden behind a curtain of silk, which streamed down from Jhardoestra's eerie pupil-less eyes. She carried a scepter across her forearm. On the tip was a familiar emblem -- two moons orbiting a blue stone.

Sophrosyne was followed by a parade of servers dancing with trays of decadent foods and casks of wine. Sophrosyne flourished her baton as each dish was presented, and the crowd "oohed" and "awed" on command, seemingly unaware of the sheer obscenity of procuring so much food in the midst of a global crisis.

Cythaelia must have mistaken Chartrulean's disgust for wonder.

CYTHAELIA DICTATES THE BANQUET

CYTHAELIA

Have you never been to a banquet  
like this before?

CHARTRULEAN

Is it strange to you that I  
haven't?

CYTHAELIA

Let me explain. It's customary for  
the woman of the house to serve as  
the banquet's officiant. Since the  
Queen passed away, that duty has  
obviously been passed down to the  
princess.

CHARTRULEAN

The queen passed away?

CYTHAELIA

Yes, tragically. Years and years  
ago. You didn't know?

CHARTRULEAN

I don't pay attention.

CYTHAELIA

The princess plays the part of the goddess Jhardoestra. She blesses the feast to bring good health and happiness to all who partake.

CHARTRULEAN

(condescending)

Yes, I'm familiar with the story of Jhardoestra.

CYTHAELIA

Now she cries rivers of blood, which turn into the wine that we drink to remember the sacrifices of her children.

CHARTRULEAN

(sarcastic)

That's a clever use of ribbons.

CYTHAELIA

I think so too. After Jhardoestra blesses the feast, she falls back into a cosmic slumber.

[Applause, end of music]

CYTHAELIA (CONT'D)

So? What did you think?

CHARTRULEAN

It's...an interesting interpretation.

CYTHAELIA

What, it's just folklore anyways.

NARRATOR

As Sophrosyne descended, her mask folded away by some hidden mechanism, revealing a young woman with pale skin, heavily contrasted by dark brown hair pulled back in a tight knot. A circlet made of silver ornamented forehead.

[Ooohs, ahhs, applause]

CYTHAELIA (CONT'D)

Don't you think she's beautiful?

[Music cue]

CHARTRULEAN INVOKES JHARDEHO

NARRATOR

But it wasn't her prettiness that struck Chartrulean. After seeing how brightly King Starbringer beamed, he found her comparatively dull, though not as dull as her brother. But unlike Imsep, her dullness wasn't from disdain. It was as if her spirit itself was being strangled.

CHARTRULEAN

*(thinking)*

*She only half-smiles. It was just a performance.*

NARRATOR

Chartrulean watched her curtsy and utter half-hearted hellos to some of the guests at her father's table. And then she was directly in front of him. Her father's blue eyes met his before dropping to the floor as she curtseyed.

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)

*(thinking)*

*Freeze.*

[Slowed heartbeat sounds, dull ringing]

NARRATOR

The room vanished beneath a tidal wave of swirling black mist. Chartrulean and Sophrosyne stood alone together in the void, him petrified by his own curiosity, and her stuck in an endless bow.

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)

*(thinking)*

*What do I see? The symbol on her scepter. It mirrors the brooch. Her costume is too radiant to make out much else.*

NARRATOR

Still in slow motion, Sophrosyne rose. Her eyes lingered on the brooch on his lapel, which in the void glowed bright azure blue, along with the piping in his jacket. Then her eyes met his.

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)

*(thinking)*

*There's something in her eyes. An awareness. Knowing. Questions. It is her.*

NARRATOR

The void receded. Sophrosyne continued down the line of attendees as if nothing had ever happened.

[Sounds returning to normal]

CYTHAELIA KICKS CHARTRULEAN

CYTHAELIA  
(whispering)  
It's not polite to stare.

CHARTRULEAN  
I wasn't.

CYTHAELIA  
Yes, you were.

[Transitional music cue]

STARBRINGER'S SPEECH

[Applause, then silence]

KING STARBRINGER  
Thank you, Lords and Ladies of Simitu, for joining us on this historic evening. For as long as most of us here have lived, our people have been embroiled in bloody conflict with the Rau. A war that has threatened progress for both our people, when so much more could be gained from peace. It's with an especially heavy heart that I recall the unparalleled loss of life the Rau have endured. Under the leadership of Admiral Lapadine, and thanks to the ingenuity and tireless efforts of Chartrulean the shipbuilder, both of whom sit at my table tonight as guests of honor, we have built weapons with the incredible destructive power...of the gods.

[Mixed murmurs from the crowd; Cydar coughing]

KING STARBRINGER (CONT'D)  
But this newfound power has given us pause.

(MORE)

KING STARBRINGER (CONT'D)  
 Why continue to destroy one another  
 when we could *build* together  
 instead?

[Cydar coughing continues]

KING STARBRINGER (CONT'D)  
 And so, for the first time, Rau  
 ambassadors have set foot on our  
 soil to sign an accord that will  
 officially bring an end to the war  
 and begin a new era of peace and  
 prosperity for both of our people.

[Applause erupts again]

KING STARBRINGER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)  
 Tonight we feast in honor of those  
 whose lives were lost, and to those  
 still living to whom we owe our  
 salvation. The men and women who  
 fought, and continue to faithfully  
 serve both our empires. And most of  
 all, tonight we raise our glasses  
 in the name of progress. For now,  
 we are closer to creating a true  
 multi-race intergalactic empire  
 than ever before.

[Cheering erupts]

KING STARBRINGER (CONT'D)  
 Without much further adieu....let's  
 eat!

[More cheers and laughter. Sounds of dishes clanking, food]

CHARTRULEAN ARGUES WITH CYTHAELIA

CYTHAELIA  
 You should eat. You look hungry.

CHARTRULEAN  
 I--I do?

[Beat]

CYTHAELIA  
 (whispering)  
 It glowed blue!

CHARTRULEAN  
 Excuse me?

CYTHAELIA

The brooch, it really glowed blue!  
And your suit. It was just for an  
instant earlier, but I saw it.

CHARTRULEAN

(suspicious)

What significance would it have to  
you if it did?

CYTHAELIA

I can't tell you.

CHARTRULEAN

I don't have any patience for  
games.

CYTHAELIA

It's not a game, it could be very  
important!

CHARTRULEAN

Do you know who gave it to me?

CYTHAELIA

Yes.

CHARTRULEAN

Will you return it to them for me?

CYTHAELIA

Why?

CHARTRULEAN

I suddenly suspect it's more  
trouble than it's worth.

CYTHAELIA

How do you mean?

CHARTRULEAN

(keeping voice low)

This whole evening is a disgusting  
charade.

CYTHAELIA

Now wait a minute.

[Sounds of Chartrulean removing brooch]

CHARTRULEAN

Here. Take it.

CYTHAELIA

I can't.

CHARTRULEAN

If you won't return it for me, then we've reached an impasse and have nothing else to discuss.

CYTHAELIA

(offended)

You're right.

[Sound of chair scraping floor]

CHARTRULEAN MAKES A RUN FOR IT

CHARTRULEAN

(thinking)

*Aha, I knew it, she's headed straight for the princess! I've reached my limit. Whatever these people want from me, they can't have it.*

[Sound of chair scooting, footsteps, and music receding. Party sounds become mixed with nighttime sounds.]

CHARTRULEAN MEETS SOPHROSYNE ON THE BALCONY

CHARTRULEAN

I've made a wrong turn.

SOPHROSYNE

(taunting)

If I didn't know any better, I'd think you were trying to escape, shipbuilder.

CHARTRULEAN

(surprise)

Princess Sophrosyne. I'm sorry, I--

SOPHROSYNE

(giggling)

You really have somewhere else you need to be, don't you?

CHARTRULEAN

Not exactly, but I've definitely attracted enough attention here tonight.

SOPHROSYNE

You'd just leave me here to put up  
with all these people?

CHARTRULEAN

Well, I'm a little out of my  
element. You have the social  
advantage.

SOPHROSYNE

I guess.

(beat)

Ugh, I wasn't expecting this to be  
so hard.

CHARTRULEAN

I beg your pardon?

SOPHROSYNE

I really don't like how this world  
is changing.

CHARTRULEAN

Eh--

SOPHROSYNE

There used to be a time when  
everybody made sense. Now they're  
all just fat and lazy.

CHARTRULEAN

This world was never perfect.  
Princess.

SOPHROSYNE

I'm so sorry, I--you probably think  
I'm ridiculous.

CHARTRULEAN

Why should you care what I think?

SOPHROSYNE

Because you're nothing like these  
people. You're...I don't know,  
better.

CHARTRULEAN

What makes me better in your eyes?

SOPHROSYNE

It's so obvious. You're the one  
who's trying to escape.

(beat)

SOPHROSYNE (CONT'D)

But there *is* something about you that scares me. Maybe it's just knowing that you're not entirely human.

CHARTRULEAN

I see. You fear things you don't understand.

SOPHROSYNE

I don't know, maybe I understand you a little.

CHARTRULEAN

I *highly* doubt that.

SOPHROSYNE

(laughing)

By the way, you shouldn't torment my friend.

CHARTRULEAN

Sorry princess, but the torment is mine. I'm not someone you can belittle..

SOPHROSYNE

Aw. Of course you aren't. How do we reconcile this?

CHARTRULEAN

By letting me return this to you.

[beat]

SOPHROSYNE

I see Yoba gave you my brooch. I'm *not* taking it back.

CHARTRULEAN

Why did you give it to me?

SOPHROSYNE

I thought you'd be a lot harder to pick out of a crowd.

CHARTRULEAN

Is that *all*?

SOPHROSYNE

How else would I have known where to send my spies?

CHARTRULEAN  
Where did you get this?

SOPHROSYNE  
It's kind of an heirloom.

CHARTRULEAN  
Then you should *definitely* take it  
back, I wouldn't feel comfortable  
keeping it.

SOPHROSYNE  
Why shouldn't you? It's mine to  
give away.

CHARTRULEAN  
Do you understand this symbol?

SOPHROSYNE  
(confused)  
Symbol?

CHARTRULEAN  
In Jhardeho, its a harbinger of  
great transformation, uncertainty,  
chaos.

SOPHROSYNE  
Oh, uh--

CHARTRULEAN  
An artifact this rare deserves  
better than to be treated like  
jewelry, or something to be traded.

SOPHROSYNE  
Who do you think made it?

CHARTRULEAN  
I was actually hoping *you* could  
tell *me*.

SOPHROSYNE  
Apparently you know more about it  
than I do already.

CHARTRULEAN  
Here.

SOPHROSYNE

No, please keep it. It has a better home with you, I'm afraid I'll just break it.

CHARTRULEAN

Things like this don't have owners, only stewards. It does interest me.

SOPHROSYNE

Good.

(beat)

But if you learn anything else about it, can you tell me? It's been a part of my family for a long time, and I'd like to know why.

CHARTRULEAN

I will. Thank you.

[Awkward silence, Chartrulean sighs uncomfortably]

(pause)

This probably sounds weird, but earlier, when I stopped at your table, did you--

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)

(interrupting)

I'm very sorry, but I'm sure we'll have other opportunities to talk.

SOPHROSYNE

Oh. Ok.

(beat)

Uhm...I don't think there's a way out without going back inside.

CHARTRULEAN

There's no need. I'll take my chances with a leap of faith. Good night. Princess.

NARRATOR

In one fluid motion, Chartrulean hoisted himself up and over the balustrade, and disappeared into the night.

[END CREDITS]